


Thorndike's LAWS OF LEARNING

Educational Psychology: Briefer Course, New York: Columbia, 1923

The Law of Effect ~ connections, that is to say learning, between a stimulus(S) and a response(R), when followed by a satisfying state of affairs, produces, other things being equal, a strengthening of the connection between the two events.

To a similar stimulus(S) and response(R) followed instead by an annoying state of affairs, other things being equal, results in a decrease in the strength of the connection between the two events. 

Executive summary: Behavior(R) in the presence of a stimulus(S) which is followed by positive consequences is strengthened, that is, it is learned and tends to continue, whereas behavior that is followed by negative consequences tends to diminish in strength and discontinue.

“By a satisfying state of affairs,” Thorndike wrote, “is meant roughly one which the animal does nothing to avoid, often doing such things as attain and preserve it.”

“An annoying state of affairs,” Thorndike wrote, “is meant roughly one which the animal avoids or changes.”

The law of Use ~ stimulus(S) and response(R) connections increase in strength through use, *i.e.*, repeated exposure and “practice” can increase the probability of a response occurring in the presence of some stimulus, ... as well as its strength.

The Law of Disuse ~ stimulus(S) and response(R) connections decrease in strength through disuse.